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Wheeler - The Wholesome Life - A sermon in Memory of Charles Grout - 1883

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from H. L. W.
Jan. 14. 1879

Charles Grout

THE WHOLESOME LIFE

A SERMON

IN MEMORY OF

CHARLES GROUT

PREACHED IN THE UNITARIAN CHURCH AT NEWTON CENTRE
MASSACHUSETTS, 31 MARCH, 1889

BY

THE REVEREND

HORACE LESLIE WHEELER

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH

TOGETHER WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE

1889

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"Wearing the white flower of a blameless life."

TENNYSON: IDYLLS.

Charles Grout

was born in Leominster, Massachusetts, October 14, 1832, and died in Newton Centre, March 27, 1889. He was the youngest of four children, two brothers and two sisters. His parents were of that best type of New England people, thrifty and God-fearing; and he was fitted by inheritance and education to become the careful, conscientious merchant, a representative of that class which has made the name of Boston merchants the symbol of honor and enterprise.

His business career began when he came to Boston, in 1853, and entered the counting-room of Hill, Burrage & Co. as entry-clerk. In 1859, he became book-keeper for the new firm of Burrage Brothers,— the Burrages themselves from Leominster. In 1865, he helped to form the firm of Richardson, Smith & Co., becoming office partner. This firm was succeeded, in 1868, by that of Smith, Stebbins & Co.; in 1874, by that of Stebbins, Grout & Co.; and, in 1879, by that of Grout, Warren & Blanchard. Such was his steady progress in business life.

He was married, on November 14, 1866, to Miss Clara M. Bassett of Chelsea, who, together with a daughter, survives him. He was a resident of Chelsea until his removal to Newton Centre in 1886.

He was for many years a member of the Mercantile Library Association, of the Boston Merchants' Association, and of other organizations.

In business he was conservative without being timid,—a valuable characteristic in a business man. In religion he was a Unitarian. He did not accept public office, but was always much interested in public and social affairs. A hard worker, he found time occasionally for short excursions into the woods with dog and gun. In manner retiring, he led a quiet, busy, and cheerful life. Keeping always in the line of progress, he held it for his chief rule of living to do his part of the world's work and give others a chance to do theirs.

He was buried from his residence in Newton Centre on March 30, the service being conducted by the Reverend J. B. Green, his former pastor, and the Reverend H. L. Wheeler, pastor of the church of which he was a member during the last years of his life.

THESE words were spoken from my pulpit on the Sunday after Mr. Grout went from us. His family and his business partners have requested to have them printed. I have not felt at liberty to recast them. The selections of Scripture and the poem which follow were read as parts of the service.

H. L. W.

NEWTON CENTRE, MASSACHUSETTS,
12 June, 1889.

Sermon.

"Whose names are in the book of life."— PHILIPPIANS iv. 3.

THERE are those to whom the present seems always to be less important than the past. There are those to whom to-day seems always insignificant in comparison with some older time. For such, the defects of contemporary life are always over-apparent; its excellences are always recognized dimly, if at all. They see little wholesomeness and no greatness in the world about them. If they would find heroism, they must look to a past which they may invest with all the strength and nobility and fineness of life which they miss at present. It may be — nay, it is most certainly the fact — that life has never been truer and nobler and finer than it is to-day. The better time so fondly dreamed of has surely never existed, but that makes no difference to these who persist in looking backward and in ignoring the excellence of the life that is about them. The time that is gone

remains for them the time when the world must have been fairer to live in than it is now, when men and women were more majestic in character, when heaven was nearer earth than it is to-day.

There is but one alternative for such natures. If they do not turn backward, they must reach forward. They cannot rest in the present. Either to the time that is gone, or to the time that is not yet come, they must look for the satisfaction of their thought of what life ought to be. You know how men have dreamed of a golden age that once existed, how they have imagined that human character was loftier then than it was in their own day, how they have fancied that the world was then nearer God than they could see it to be when their eyes looked out upon it, how they have thought that once the human was more charged with the divine than it seemed to be as they observed it. You know, on the other hand, how men have looked for the coming of a perfect day, when all that was ignoble and evil should be done away with, when earth should be once more in close alliance with heaven, when all of nobility the past had had should be recovered and reinstated. It is well for us all if we have such a vision of the future as this; it is well for us if we have faith enough in the noble tenden-

cies of the world, to believe with all our hearts that wrong and imperfection are to be supplanted by righteousness and perfection of life,— that the better influences which are at work are to have their way at last, and by their own development crowd out the worse elements in human existence. It is well for us to have this faith in the redemption of the world, if that redemption be thought of as a development from present to future conditions, as the orderly triumph of righteousness over sin and of completeness over incompleteness. The Eden that is yet to be is a wholesome influence over our thought. That coming Eden is what our ideals mean. Without some such dream of the future we are not likely to live at our noblest. There would necessarily be somewhat too much of the Stoic in the character of a man, who, realizing keenly how manifold were the defects of human life, should see no hope of better things and at the same time be undisturbed. There would be more of indifference in such a character than is desirable. We need the incentive of a faith, we need more than hope, and certainly something else than indifference, to call into play the high capacities of thought and action that are within us. Such is the good influence of the Eden that lies before. But I

do not think it well for him in whose thought Eden lies behind. The future, not the past, ought to hold it. He who believes in retrogression, and believes that this is inevitable, must surely live an unsatisfactory and unwholesome life. Very valiantly he may struggle to keep the downward forces from having their way; very courageous he may be as he sets himself against the evil tide which he cannot check; but his own activity cannot be so wholesome for the world as it would be if he believed that effort was not fruitless, if he had the hope and the faith that the real tide of the world was one of righteousness instead of one of evil, that the movement of human life was forward instead of backward.

The fault of both outlooks, that which faces forward and that which faces backward, is, indeed, likely to be the same. By looking to the past as the time of superiority, and by looking too earnestly to the future as the time of the dream's fulfilment, one incurs the danger of ignoring the real excellence of the present. He is the wise man who accepts his own time as the best in which he could possibly be alive. He is wise who is willing to see that in a thousand ways the present is the fulfilment of the dream that came to men of old. He is not wise who counts his own time

as inferior beside the past or as insignificant beside the future. A very small pebble held immediately before the eye will shut out the whole landscape. So the too close contemplation of a flaw in human life will blind a man to the wide prospect of excellence, which would lie before him were he not looking at that one defect so closely. It is the habit of some men: they bring defects too near their eyes, and so are unable to see the positive qualities which are the good characteristics of the time in which they live; they dream of an impossible past, when life was better than it has ever really been; they dream of a possible future, when life shall have all good characteristics which it lacks in their own day. So they pass over many a phenomenon which invests the world of to-day with wholesomeness and beauty. To dwell upon the past or upon the future is not well for us, if that emphasis lead us to ignore the time in which we are set to live. We are not fair to our own day; we are not wise observers of contemporary life, if we are unable or unwilling to discern how noble it is in countless ways, if we ignore the wholesomeness and excellence, the strength and the beauty, which are embodied in many a man and woman around us.

Let us see contemporary life as it really is; let us

not be willing to excuse its shortcomings; let no sentimentalism lead us to palliate its transgressions of the laws of right; let us not condone its faults; let us think of it soberly; let us form sound judgments of it; let us condemn its superficiality of thought and its ignoble standards of conduct; let us hold it to a strict accountability. But, at the same time, let our minds be open to the recognition of good influences; let us be willing to admire; let us have the clear vision for goodness; and when we perceive a life that does set forth the ideal of righteousness, let us seize upon it for our contemplation, and, with devoutest thankfulness that we have seen it, take it as a model to be followed; and be willing to have it serve as an inspiration for us.

If we are willing to look soberly at life as humanity sets it forth, we shall find many golden threads in its web. In the forest of humanity, with its many stunted and perverted growths, we shall discern many a lordly tree whose girth is great and which lifts its head far above its surrounding fellows. It is not the worst but the best of times in which to live. If you look for the best human characteristics, you shall find them about you here and now. If you seek for heroism, shall you discover your best example on

some battle-ground of the past, or on the modern vessel,—where the pilot keeps his hands upon the wheel, with the determination to bring the ship to land, until the flames destroy both will and life together? Is it best shown by one of the three hundred at Thermopylæ, or by the cashier who prefers death to the betrayal of his trust, and from whom no threat can extort the secret of the combination that opens the treasure-vault? Who shows the greatest devotion to truth,—some ancient martyr, willing to die for his convictions, or some modern scientist, exhausting his life in the search for a fuller understanding of the laws of the universe? The world has seen no greater consecration to truth than is shown by the scientific spirit of this age. Nor shall you find, in any time that has been, more perfect sacrifice of self for the good of humanity than was shown by Dorothy Pattison in her work among the Walsall miners. There has never been a time when ideals of character were higher than they are to-day; there has never been a time when more exacting demands were made upon men to be true in thought and right in deed than are made at present; and there has never been a time when the response to these demands was made more nobly than it is now, or when the highest ideals

were more resolutely adopted and followed than they are by the men and women whom we meet and know. The very increase in our knowledge, by bringing us face to face with the appalling problems of life, has made it harder than ever to be true in our thought, harder than ever to do our duty in discovering the wise way of dealing with these problems. The very increase in our material resources, by introducing complexity into life, has made it harder than ever for a man to keep his conduct right. So the temptation to work for personal advantage and to ignore the rights of others, has been increased. Nevertheless, thought was never more earnest and profound than it is to-day, and conduct was never more conscientiously ordered. If there are superficiality of thought, and carelessness of conduct, and insensibility of feeling, to be observed,— and we all know that these exist,— it is, nevertheless, true that humanity lets no challenge pass, but accepts it, and vindicates its own character. It is earnest for the truth; it is zealous for the right; it is sympathetic with all suffering. All around us are many whose influence makes the world a better place to live in. They hold themselves to the strictest accountability for the tendency of their lives. They believe in the highest character, and, if we look, we shall find them true to their ideals.

Recognized or unrecognized, in greater or less careers, they give of their personal force to swell the tide of moral wholesomeness that sweeps around the world. Their "names are in the book of life."

I know of no purpose that a man can set before himself so worthy as this of increasing the world's tide of moral wholesomeness. I would make a stronger statement, and say that I know of no other worthy purpose whatsoever. There are other objects of ambition that are worth striving for, but all must be temporary that this purpose does not underlie. We may measure success as we will,— by the acquisition of wealth, by the attainment of position, by the development of one's capacities, intellectual or practical; but we have no permanent measure of success except that of the realization of character. The work of men differs widely. The ways in which the energies of their lives may be directed are as numberless as the points which make up the circumference of a circle, but the real work of their lives is the building of character. There is nothing else to live for. This is the work that the man of to-day has in common with Moses or with some spirit of a yet older time. Whatever men may do, this is the work they are about if they are about anything of consequence.

The balance beam suspended from God's hand will sway for nothing but character. Only the moral has weight; nothing else is substantial. There is no standard of success but the noble response of a man's nature to the stimulus of his environment. If this come as evil, does he set himself against it? If it come as good, does he yield himself to it? According as these questions are answered, is it declared whether he is one of the disintegrating or one of the upbuilding forces of the world. To temptations without and to tendencies within, which would lead him to do the wrong, does he offer stern resistance? To opportunities without and to ideals that kindle their flame within his soul, which would bring him to do the right, does he yield himself in more than willingness, in the sincere desire to be swept upward by them on to a higher plane of life? *There* is the test of what he is really worth. If we answer these questions, we have answered the question whether he has reached success; we have answered the question whether his name is "in the book of life."

We talk of greatness; but what do we mean by it? We say that Themistocles and Socrates, that Cæsar and Cicero, that Napoleon and Isaac Newton, that Dante and Goethe, that Beethoven and Darwin, that

Cavour and Lincoln, were great men. We may measure greatness by such standards as these have set. These men lift themselves above their fellows: in music, in literature, in philosophy, in science, in military and administrative ability, these and others of their type are eminent. They count therefore as great men in the history of the world. Tried by the true test, however, some of them might not be counted so. One life of a little more than thirty years has shaped the ideals of civilization through nearly nineteen centuries: its influence has been greater than that of all of these; and, if these have had any worthy influence over men, this has been because they have had characteristics in common with him. Is the greatest who is only great to be put alongside of him? Does Napoleon stand upon the same plane with Jesus? If not, which is the higher? and which, then, is the greater? The truth is this: there is no greatness that is not goodness; there is no excellence of life that is not moral; there is no worthy harvest gathered from the field of the world but the harvest of character.

And, on the other hand, there is no harvest of character that is not a worthy harvest; all that is moral is excellent; there is no goodness in the world that

is not greatness, too. Would that humanity would learn this lesson! Would that it would understand the measure of its greatness! Would that it would become conscious of the loftiness to which it is exalted by its endowment of goodness! Would that men would realize, on the one hand, how they can and ought to bring character nearer to perfection, and how they *must*, if they are to reach their destiny; and, on the other, how high is the praise that is passed upon a life when it can be said of it that it is simply good! This is the paradox which we observe in life: that the attainment which ought to be the destiny of all is so exceptional that one who has made it towers above others, and that the praise which ought to be extended to all can be awarded only to one here and to another there. It is true that there are a multitude who make this attainment; it is true that the vague purpose of humanity is to make it; it is true, I trust, that all of us are serious enough about our life to have made some progress on this road to the realization of character; and yet the life that has made such attainment, with anything like completeness, stands out before us as exceptional, as superior to our own, as something which challenges our attention and commands our admiration.

Dear friends, you understand my thought. You see that in all I say I have in mind one whom the heavenly Father has called, during the week that is just past, into the life that is higher and fuller and freer than that we live, because it is nearer to himself. The praise of being simply good is the highest that can be given to a human life. I bring it to this life that has been taken; and, in bringing it, I pronounce not only my own deliberate and sincere judgment, but also that of a multitude who knew him who has gone, and many of whom by their presence yesterday pronounced it silently. As I bring this inadequate tribute to his memory and lay it at the feet of those to whom he was most dear, I know that I speak the word that would rise to the lips of many, that I express the thought and the emotion that are in the minds and hearts of a multitude. I have felt profoundly the nobleness, the grandeur, the simple beauty, of that life,— how profoundly I did not realize until the gates of the other world had opened for it to enter in. My sense of loss is deeper than I can express. There are some men whom one does not have to meet often, in order to perceive their quality. One knows early in one's acquaintance that one would give much to call them by the name of

friends. I was allowed to call Charles Grout my friend. I knew him in the counting-room and in the tender and beautiful life of his home. When sickness came upon him I knew how much he was to me: it was a vague sort of knowledge in comparison with that which dawned upon me after "God's finger touch'd him, and he slept." But I found in him only what many found who came into relations with him,—the man who was always simple, firm, broad-minded, sympathetic, generous, and utterly sincere. The influence of such a man is subtle over those he meets. These may discern the quality of his nature at first, but they have to learn its quantity very gradually. They do not know at the beginning how respect will grow, as toward him it grew with many, into a real affection. He who was so reticent, who rarely put his judgment of men forward, and who seldom gave counsel without its being asked, but who, when he did speak, spoke always so wisely, had the power of grappling men to his "soul with hoops of steel." He called forth their confidence: they would have trusted him with all that was theirs. Men take one another generally on faith; they believe in one another because they throw their wills on the side of doing so; but this man's genuineness was so almost

tangible that they relied upon him with something of the certainty of knowledge. Such a man many found him; and, now that he has passed beyond the vision of the eye and within the country's borders across which we can no longer hear his voice nor call to him, we know that, whatever be the gain to him,— and, though this life is so dear and good, the other must be gain,— we have suffered the blow of a great loss. The church which would have gained greatly from his wise counsel has lost much by losing him. The community in which his influence would have been increasingly felt has lost more than it can be aware of. The business world has lost one who was always upright, who kept his integrity unblemished, against whom no whisper could ever be breathed. His was the character great in its simplicity, hewn out of the everlasting rock,— the character which steadily draws the respect of men, and surely makes its way to their affections.

I think of him as the type of man which the world has great need of. He was the type of the modern saint,— the man who is in the world, alive to all its happiness, to whom all things are lawful, because of his belief that the earth and all its fulness are the Lord's, and yet who is not of the world in any evil

sense. His nature was such that whatever he was prompted to do was right. He was "instinct-good." It was as natural for him to be good as it is for the vine to bear its fruit. He needed not to force himself to obey the outward law, for the impulses toward noble living filled his heart. In living so that his life swelled the tide of the world's moral wholesomeness, he moved along his line of least resistance. He would have claimed no credit for this; but to be naturally right is the realization of character, and to be so is to have one's name "in the book of life."

His life is a memory now, but it is also an inspiration. We who knew him ought to be better for the knowledge. Life for each of us ought to be more faithful and ordered on a higher plane, because of this manifestation of what a life may be. He has "gone into the world of light" which our darkness renders invisible. But the two worlds belong together. Both are within the circle of the eternal Father's care. We cannot look forward; but they who are beyond can doubtless look backward. We cannot see as we look upward; but they, doubtless, have the clear vision as they look downward upon the life that was theirs. For them knowledge of many things has taken the place of faith; and they

know that the two worlds are not separate, but only parts of the one universe which God rules and the inhabitants of which he loves; and they know how close to us they can be as we try in all fidelity to do the work which lies before us here and now.

AND seeing the multitudes, he went up into the mountain: and when he had sat down, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth and taught them, saying,

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house. Even so let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.—MATTHEW v. 1–16.

FOR we know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens.... For indeed we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed, but that we would be clothed upon, that what is mortal may be swallowed up of life. Now he that wrought us for this very thing is God, who gave unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Being therefore always of good courage, and knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord (for we walk by faith, not by sight); we are of good courage, I say, and are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord. Wherefore also we make it our aim, whether at home or absent, to be well-pleasing unto him. For we must all be made manifest before the judgement-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad.—2 CORINTHIANS v. 1–10.

The Other Side.

CLIMBING the mountain's shaggy crest,
  I wondered much what sight would greet
  My eager gaze whene'er my feet
Upon the topmost height should rest.

The other side was all unknown;
  But, as I slowly toiled along,
  Sweeter to me than any song
My dream of visions to be shown.

At length the topmost height was gained;
  The other side was full in view;
  My dreams — not one of them was true,
But better far had I attained.

For far and wide on either hand
  There stretched a valley broad and fair,
  With greenness flashing everywhere,—
A pleasant, smiling, home-like land.

Who knows, I thought, but so 'twill prove
  Upon that mountain-top of death,
  Where we shall draw diviner breath,
And see the long-lost friends we love.

It may not be as we have dreamed,
  Not half so awful, strange, and grand;
  A quiet, peaceful, home-like land,
Better than e'er in vision gleamed.

JOHN WHITE CHADWICK.

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